



Godard's Revolution: The Politics of Meta-Cinema

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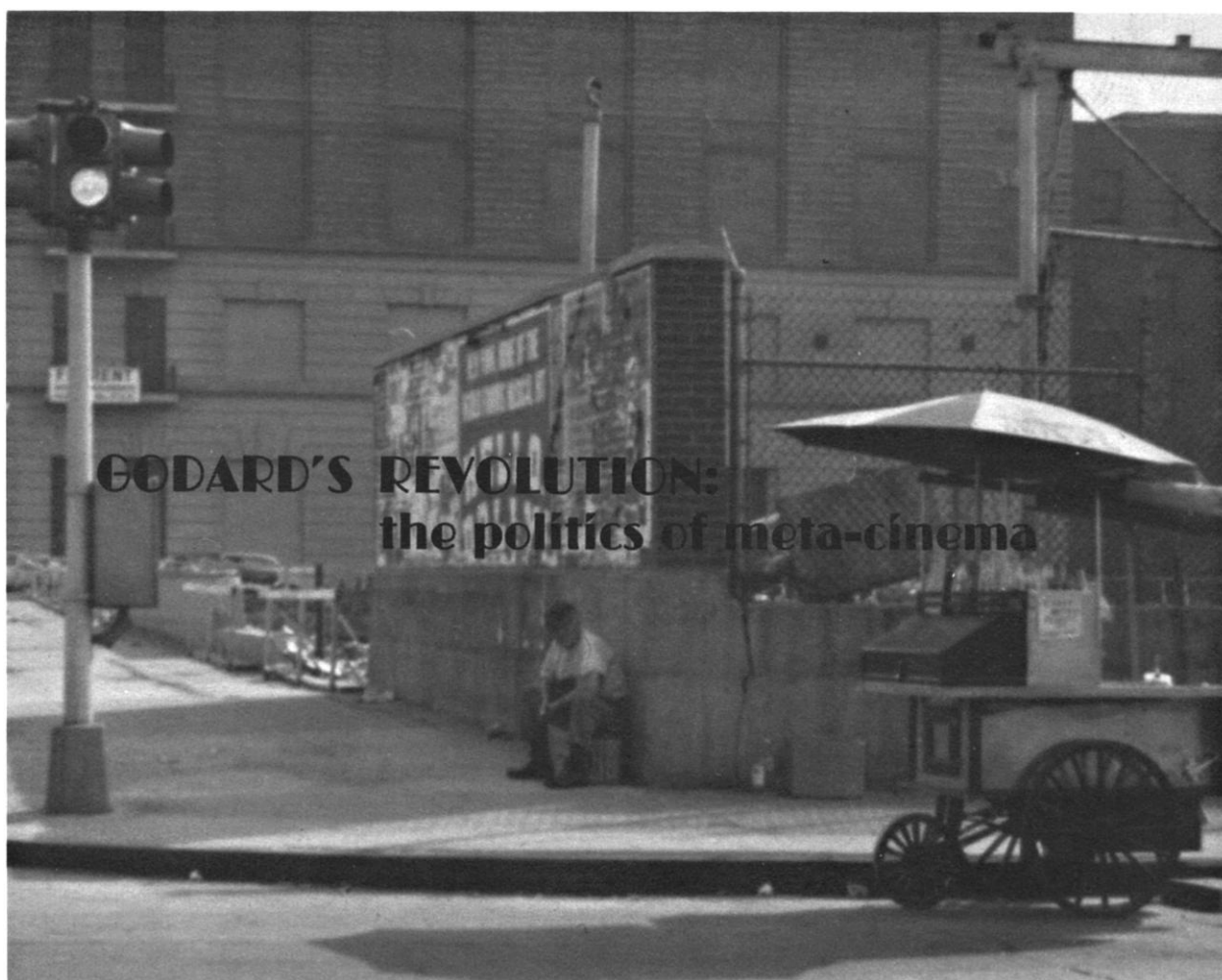
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Thomas M. Kavanagh

There are times when class struggle is the struggle of an image against an image and of a sound against a sound. In a film, it is the struggle of an image against a sound and a sound against an image.

British Sounds/
See You In Mao

The recent screenings of *Tout va bien* and *Letter from Hanoi* confirm—after a long silence—Godard's position as one of the most changeable and certainly the most influential figure within the ever-growing group of "revolutionary" film-makers. From his first feature in 1959 he has moved further and further away from any conventional notion of the film as telling a story, portraying a character, or revealing an auteurial consciousness. Disowning all his films made before 1968, declaring his purpose to be the destruction of cinema, substituting a rigorously collective control (the Dziga-Vertov Group) for the

director's privileged position, he has called into question our very conception of the film as a work of art. His refusal to play the role of the artist in a bourgeois society has become exemplary.

Understanding what is taking form—or perhaps better said to be losing form—in Godard's progressively more political films must begin with a consideration of those works made during the pivotal period of 1966 to 1968. It was during this time that his specifically political interest came to center more and more on the semantic implications of the film as a form: how and why is it that a series of images accompanied by sound can mean; how do they relate to and act upon an audience's perception of its own situation?

In confronting these questions he has, more than any other single film-maker, been responsible for the cinema's coming to take a privileged position in the contemporary debate as to how things mean, what "meaning" itself implies, and how it is related to the more general problem of revolution. In effect, Godard realized that forcing his audience to "make a decision" was premature as long as this decision was not preceded by a firm understanding, or at least realization, of the epistemological manipulation to which we are everywhere subjected by our media culture.

In order to understand this change we must

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first analyse Godard's redefinition of the role of the film-maker as it grew out of his participation in the events of May 1968. I would propose that it is by comparing two films centered around this pivotal period—*Two or Three Things* and *Le Gai Savoir*—that we can best prepare a later analysis of the specifically revolutionary esthetic informing the films going from *One Plus One* to the second radical departure of *Tout va bien*.

Seen from this perspective, *Two or Three Things* would represent his most complete treatment, within an alien context, of an ever more obsessive concern which will ultimately subvert his whole conception of the filmic endeavor. The second film, *Le Gai Savoir*, the film *semantically* central to Godard's evolution, is the marking of an hiatus, a stock-taking, a return to the drawing board to work out just what and how cinema can *mean* and *be* in relation to its political function. As this film had as its subject "the making of a film," the later works would then be the first "films made," the first creations in terms of this new understanding. Destruction, reconsideration, creation: three moments in a single career which has radically redefined the goals and methods of the film.

Two or Three Things is the last of Godard's films which can be legitimately discussed in terms of character. And even here the solidity of the main character—Juliette Janson—is called into question from the opening shots: after various rapid scenes of the Paris cityscape we see a girl's face through an apartment window. The narrator's (Godard's) voice whispers: "She is Marina Vlady. She is an actress. She is wearing a sweater with yellow stripes." This is immediately followed by a second shot of the same window and face, but from a slightly different angle. The narrator's voice now states: "She is Juliette Janson. She lives here. She is wearing a sweater with yellow stripes." Like a Brechtian parenthesis, this pointing to the film as film nonetheless does not interfere with our rapidly accepting Juliette as a full-blown psychological presence plagued by such fears as her recurring dream of being scattered into a thousand fragments. Her conscious life is a kind of mindlessly compulsive consumption sustainable only by whoring during her otherwise idle afternoons. As alienated and robotized as Juliette might appear in her addictive epic of consumerism, she takes on psychological depth in the ambiguous first-person monologues with which she comments on her actions. Toward the end of the film she is able to crystallize all her despair into repeating. "And then what?" to counter each of her husband's replies to the question: "What will we do then?" Perplexed, his final answer can only be: "I don't know? . . . die?"

As in the whole series of film from *Breathless* to *Pierrot le fou*, Godard is elaborating his intent through a narrative dealing with highly individualized, psychologically full characters who inhabit and relate to a world similar to our own.

The film's very title, however, is the key to a bifurcation leading in a radically different direction: *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*. Like all pronouns, the word *her* is purely relational, dependent for its meaning on the context in which it appears. In this case the film itself is the relevant con-

text. Its various elements can be accounted for only when we accept the many shots of Paris, the sequences dealing with construction, the views of rivers, trees and roadways as demanding a double referent for this *her* we come to know two or three things about. *She* must be Paris as a city just as *she* is Juliette Janson.

This ambiguity is, in fact, essential to the film's political impact. Juliette is what she is only because she lives in and is a part of Paris; Paris, conversely, is what it is only because it is the product and environment of the millions of Juliettes who dwell within it. The city gaudifies itself with flashy, clap-trap constructions in exactly the same way that Juliette careens from boutique to brothel to beauty parlor. Paris severs its last links with nature just as Juliette encases herself in the vinyl and cement cocoons of coat and apartment house. At two distinct points in the film Juliette's voice declares: "I was the world and the world was me." One of these moments is situated in the past, the other in the present. The past is that of a lost springtime: the image we see is a calm, tree-lined street—green leaf and grey brick form a composition of perfect harmony, the alliance of man and nature in a moment of beauty. It is almost redundant that Juliette declare: "Then I was happy." The second, the present moment, finds Juliette in front of, up against the wall of, her already decaying, prisonlike modern apartment house. The drab, inhuman, anti-human nature of this thanosphere is emphasized by the 360° pan showing an encircling wall of concrete and glass broken only by a barren, treeless plain.

"No element within a landscape," Juliette's voice tells us, "has an autonomous existence." And this "element" can be a person just as well as a building, a bridge or a gas station. Man lives in "a world where every object carries with it a memory and a meaning": and it is this memory and meaning which is the vital space, the human space. *Two or Three Things* shows us a world in process, a world where a thing exists only as an object of rapid consumption, of rapid replacement. Buildings go up and roads are constructed as quickly and as meaninglessly as soap powder is consumed and fashions change. The human is excluded: memory and meaning submerged.

In such a setting man loses both contact with himself and control over his world. Godard isolates as the index of this lobotomization man's alienation from language as the principal form both of communication with others and of understanding the self. As Paris is the city in which Juliette lives, language is defined as the house in which she dwells. The problem of language, of man's relation to and creation of meaning, occupies the very center of this film.

Language is presented as the vehicle of both man's presence within and his effect upon the world. At one point the narrator's voice defines language as "that with which man imposes a limit upon the world": that with which he encircles, comprehends and thus modifies his world. A limit is a separation, a discontinuity, a break. It implies being outside of what it designates, being able to adopt a removed, subversive perspective toward it, being able to grasp

it and thus modify it in a desired direction. Death is defined not only as the end of life, but as the end of language: "the abolition of this [language's] limit."

Juliette's dissatisfaction, her incompleteness, is a crisis of language, an inability to manipulate and express herself within a symbolic system. She certainly knows that something is missing from her life, but she cannot *say* what. Anguish is an aphasia. Juliette can no longer name objects: the objects of her desires and fears. Her facial expression is the icon of her existential situation: a numbed look of puzzled bewilderment as she tries to understand and to enunciate what it is she is doing, where it is she is going. Critical thought, the expression of a radical dissatisfaction with the real, is cut off from expression and can emerge only as the fragments of a glimpsed but never understood subconscious: at one time Juliette's nightmares were of disappearing in an enormous chasm, but now they are of flying apart in a thousand pieces. This nightmare image, recited but never comprehended by the dreamer, takes us to the film's center: Juliette, like the Paris in which she lives, is fragmented, dispersed, ripped apart by the objects and meanings imposed upon her.

At one point in the film Juliette's husband, Bernard, asks the girl sitting next to him in the cafe what it means to speak. She answers that to speak is to say words. And what does it mean, he presses, to say words? To say words is to speak. Language is reduced, even in its own definition, to tautology: what is, is. This world has insulated itself against all contact with language's subversive power: its ability, not to confirm, but to dominate, to analyze, and to transform existence has been taken away.

In symbiosis with her environment, Juliette's ability to activate language as a radical challenge to what is has been stifled by a thoroughly artificial world glutted with closed, tautologically signifying objects. Eye-stopping packaging, advertisements, publicity: the whole urban landscape becomes an impervious visual continuum where man can no longer know even the luxury of shutting his eyes and ears. To be so tyrannized by a culture's imagery is to become mute. In the beginning was the word, in the end there is only the image. Once the speaker, man has become the spoken.

This purely representational aspect of the film is, however, enclosed within a more abstracted level of filmic discourse: that of the narrator-director. Godard's whispering voice has a dual function corresponding to the two aspects of his presence. As narrator, he can speak in a voice unattainable by his characters; as director, he can manipulate rather than be manipulated by the sequence of visual images. This power allows him to fracture the dull surface of tautological images to which the characters are confined. It is through his juxtaposing of images that we, the viewers, come to see Juliette and Paris as mutually defining yet arbitrarily limited presences. It is Godard who at one point can use the super close-up of a coffee cup to transform it into the new genesis of a swirling, bubbling cauldron from which all life and thought have sprung.

It is as narrator, as one capable of language, that Godard sets forth what must become the common goal of film-maker, writer, poet and politician:

"the creation and expression of a new union of man and object, a new relation of speech and image such that true life, and true joy, become possible."

The narrator-director tells us that man's life is a "comic strip life": a combination of image and language. What is missing, he continues, is a language (both of words and images) powerful enough, critical enough, subversive enough to redefine the opaque stolid truisms of our commercialized consumer society. Man is a prisoner of the political, economic and ideological tyranny exercised by a sound-image continuum which attempts only to justify his enslavement. The artist must pose an alternative.

Savoir, c'est pas mal.

Godard, *Le Gai Savoir*

What do people really understand by knowledge? [. . .] Nothing more than the apparent need to trace what is strange back to something known. The known, that is to say, what we are accustomed to so that we no longer marvel at it: [. . .] is our need of knowing anything more than this need of the known?

Nietzsche, *Le Gai Savoir*

Released after May 1968, *Le Gai Savoir* represents a radically different approach to the problem of cinema within a pre-revolutionary society. Godard, as film-maker, comes face to face with all the implications of a didactic art form. Could it not be that in "having something to say" and in using the film as a means of saying it, he has implicitly castrated what is the real potential of the work of art? The problem Godard is dealing with parallels exactly the Heideggerian challenge already directed at literature as a meaning-oriented form: to act as though some kind of innocent discourse could be used against ideology amounts to continuing to believe that language can be a kind of neutral instrument aimed at communicating some triumphal message. As Barthes has pointed out: "in fact, no language exists outside of the bourgeois ideology. Our language stems from this ideology, returns to it, and remains always within it. The only possible counter-attack is neither that of confrontation nor that of destruction, but that of theft: fragmenting the text devoted to culture, to science, to literature and dissimulating its characteristics into unrecognizable forms in much the same way one would disguise stolen merchandise [. . .] The work's social importance is due to the violence which allows it to go beyond the laws of a society, of an ideology, or of a philosophy which present themselves as capable of reconciling all contradictions in some beautiful movement of historical intelligibility" (*Sade, Loyola, Fourier*. Paris: Seuil, 1971; pp. 51-52).

Le Gai Savoir ends as it began: the black,

emptied image of a darkened television studio—the transmitter of images and sounds for mass consumption is blank and mute. This stillness of the image serves, however, to accentuate the importance of the narrator's closing statement: "This film is not and cannot be an attempt to explain the cinema nor to embody its object, but it merely suggests effective ways to achieve it. This is not the film that should be made, but if a film is to be made, it must follow some of the paths shown here." No, this is not the film that should be made and, as one of the characters has pointed out earlier, it is a failure. It could, however, hardly have been otherwise: the film's major premise is that no real cinema is possible.

Few films declared their horror, their contempt for the Western bourgeoisie as explicitly and as unrelentingly as did Godard's *Weekend*, the work immediately preceding *Le Gai Savoir*. Yet the bourgeoisie adored it. In spite of some critics' outrage, this film remained eminently recuperable: it had the largest commercial success of all Godard's films. Denouncing a certain way of life, its viewing became one more obligatory ritual making up that way of life. Something more had to be done, some way had to be found to shortcircuit this embarrassing complicity with an audience he no longer sought to please. If a revolutionary film was to be made, if a film was actually to embody, rather than comfortably proclaim an absolute refusal of the status quo, it presupposed a radical reconsideration of what film is: a stepping outside of all conventions, even those of parody and satire.

Is it even possible, Godard seemed to be asking, to *express* one's contempt? Are convictions, sincerity, and even understanding sufficient to make a statement which in some way poses a real threat to the ideological reign of the bourgeoisie? Early in *Le Gai Savoir* it is pointed out that even the "best" filmmakers (Dreyer, Bresson, Antonioni, Bergman) have not always avoided the *idéologie du vécu* (the ideology of the true-to-life). What this phrase means is clarified toward the end of the film when, under the title of *film psychologique*, we see [recalling the earlier attempt at a similar satire in the movie theatre sequence of *Masculin-Féminin*] an obvious parody of Bergman's latest films: following a still from *Persona*, Emile Rousseau (Jean-Pierre Léaud) and Patricia Lumumba (Juliette Berto) blandly recite to each other an enumeration of all the existential woes afflicting the always so similar succession of Bergman characters: "If I told you my dreams . . . my terrible doubting of everything . . . this 'I' and this 'you' which stop me from saying 'we.' " Adopting the *Persona* pose of each one's head resting on the other's shoulder, Emile and Patricia run through, as a series of mathematical permutations, all the possible combinations of Bergman's key themes.

This representation of man's "lived" anguish can be termed ideological because it does not call into question the existence of a language, a world, and a reality as expressible and immediately understandable in a somehow neutral way. It is rather assumed that this supposedly innocent language (both of words and of images) can, thanks to a second, motivated act of esthetic manipulation, figure forth

an allegorical representation of man's universal dilemma. All such *films psychologiques* proclaim themselves as a refusal of "lies," a depiction of life as it is with all veils torn from the emptiness of our existence. The long sacred and eminently recuperated vocabulary of existentialism is never far away: "bad faith" and an "authentic" awareness of man's "nothingness" leisurely debate their way through the whole of Bergman's opus.

Le Gai Savoir carries out a radical displacement of the problematic with which film should be concerned. Isn't Bergman's (like *Weekend's*) commercial—and commercialized—success the proof of his innocuousness? This anguish is not only something we can understand, but something we can vicariously enjoy. Is "authenticity" (let alone "freedom") ever expressible in a language given to us ready-made by the culture in which we live? In a sense, the struggle for real understanding (as the basis for any of the more existentially fashionable themes which might grow out of it) is already lost when one accepts a language of representation as being itself beyond question. Learning a culture's language is always a process of conditioning to that culture: active expression is only the other side of one's passive assimilation by all the values sustaining that language. Active and passive become, as *Le Gai Savoir* repeatedly points out, simultaneous: "she thinks, she is thought," "we have understood to the extent that we become a part of what is said to us," and "man is what he does and what is done to him."

This last quotation, as an augmented version of Sartre's famous "Man is what he does," qualifies *Le Gai Savoir* as the first film to concern itself explicitly with man's contemporary problematic: before we can proceed to the existential program of appearing to be no different than we are, we must first consider the properly ideological implications of our having come to be within a culture furnishing us with means of expression always carrying with them a second, a hidden function of *impression*.

On one level this entire film is a footnote to May '68's unmasking of all educational systems as a process refusing any real concern with "education" (*e-ducere*, to lead out of) in order to substitute for it what might be more properly described as an "induction" (*in-ducere*, to lead into) of all those who pass through it into a particular ideological system. In Godard's whispered narration reference is made to the two-track education adopted by all the Western democracies: the children of the rich receive a long, theoretic education marking them off as the possessors of superior knowledge qualifying them to direct and manage that economy; the children of the poor receive a short, practical education preparing them as the faithful employees of their supposed intellectual betters. All schooling is brainwashing, an acculturation to the prejudices and tastes of a particular society.

Such a statement, however, touches only the more obvious forms of repression. Education's ideological function is not limited to such clear cut demarcations. The school, as the teacher of reading and writing, introduces the child from his earliest years to a definitely ideological vision of the real.

Even the first-grader's letterbook can be seen as an exercise in repression and sublimation. Under the letter *M*, Emile points out, there is the image of a military medal and the word, *meilleur* (better). The sentence demonstrating its usage is *La brioche est meilleure que le pain* (Cake is better than bread) "which proves that the De Gaulle-Pompidou government of 1968 talks to the worker in exactly the same language as that used by Marie-Antoinette in 1789." Under the letter *P* there is no mention of police or psychoanalysis; under *C* no mention of class, capitalism or communism; under *F*, the word *faim* (hunger) followed by food, but not fascism. The example for *faim*'s usage is *Quand j'ai faim, je me mets à table* (When I'm hungry, I sit down to eat). "And what," asks Emile, "about the children in Biafra?"

When this cultural brainwashing is so intimately tied up with the primary elements of our language, how can a revolutionary art pretend to adopt this language as a supposedly innocent vehicle for the use of which it claims to pay no price? Emile, like his great-great-great-grandfather (see especially *Le Discours sur l'origine des langues*), realizes that language is an essential part of the societal and political structure in which it functions. An articulated language, one made up of the words Emile and Patricia set out to analyze, is a self-defining, tautological system: there is nothing about any particular word or phoneme which qualifies it as the necessary sign of a given concept. The dictionary becomes the first and fundamental symbol of a culture's blatant yet naturalized arbitrariness: we look within it for a word's meaning, but that meaning itself is only a combination of other words for whose meaning we are likewise dependent upon this self-generating and self-serving encyclopedia of all possible knowledge. Language never intersects with reality, it encircles it, captures it, depositing within it all that we will ever "empirically" find there.

A film, like our "comic strip lives," is a combination of sounds and images. As the revolutionary must distrust spoken language, so also must he distrust the language of the image. To accept the "real" world as being the film's referent ends our revolution before it is begun. There is nothing innocent about aiming our camera at the "world." No matter how ironic and devastating one's montages and commentaries might be, to start from the real *as real* is to become the victims of a mystification—the mystification of that very ideology we set out to destroy. The various objects within the seamless web of our environment are not *facts* standing innocently ready for interpretation. They are themselves interpretations of yet other interpretations already solid, already defined, already "real." To approach this plenum as a passive material awaiting the artist's creative synthesis is to ignore, and to lose control over, a sedimentation of pre-existing meanings (intellectual, economic, political) more than capable of neutralizing our most belligerent attacks. Thus it is that in this film the spectator, slowly mithridatized, can tolerate the real only as brief cuts of Parisian street scenes intermittently appearing within the properly analytic and highly stylized body of the film.

Shortly after the film begins, when Emile and

Patricia have entered the darkened television studio from stage-right and stage-left, Patricia opens a transparent plastic umbrella which she twirls above her head. Emile assumes it to be a "radiation deflector." No, Patricia points out, not a "radiation deflector," but a "conscience deflector." Con-science, knowing with, knowing in complicity: it is this complicitous knowledge which must be deflected, pushed aside. Subversive thought, revolutionary thought can occur only as the hollowing out of a space reclaimed, a space liberated from the encircling sound-image cultural ideology in which we are constantly submerged. Standing in opposition to the frequent full-circle pans of Godard's earlier films is the initiation of a more fundamental, properly semiological circularity pushing its way out from an achieved zero degree of non-ideological thought. Emile mistakenly suggests that their task is to "start from zero." Patricia insists, on the contrary, that zero is not something we can start from, not something given. The real battle, the revolutionary battle is rather, as Emile's eponym so well understood, to get back to zero, to find again a vision uncorrupted by the shackles of everything we so readily assume as given.

In much the same way that Rousseau's Emile of 1762 was, thanks to a carefully supervised anti-education, to become the free man, an island of liberty proclaiming his independence in a sea of social enslavement, so also is the Emile of 1968 to follow a curriculum of liberation spread out over three years. The first year will be devoted to collecting images and sounds; the second to criticizing, decomposing, reducing, and substituting these inevitably ideological images and sounds; the third year, flowing from the first two, will be devoted to the construction of two or three sound-image models guided by Patricia's revolutionary theories. After the three years are past (presented in the film as the seven nights of de-creation), Emile remarks that what they have discovered is nothingness—but a salutary nothingness, the final evacuation of a glutted, supersignificant culture everywhere impressing upon us its values and its ideology.

How is this evacuation, this de-schooling to be carried out? Paralleling the progression from a critique of the university's systematized repression to its more insidiously simple components as inculcated by the primary school, Patricia cautions that whenever we are confronted by a fact, a statement, an image apparently unquestionable in its objectivity, we must look beyond that ideological simplicity to discover a suppressed complexity: "an image is never an image, but a contradiction of images." No image, filmic or otherwise, can be an innocent copy of what is: every image implies a method of its fabrication or isolation. We must discover the discourse of that method and, in so doing, discover our own discourse as societal beings inevitably influenced by and defining ourselves within those images. Rejecting the *ideology of the real* (the belief that things are somehow innocently there) is the first and necessary step toward overcoming the *ideology of the true-to-life* (the belief that these same things can somehow be innocently represented). The proper object of study, once simplicity is unmasked, becomes the "rapports, relationships, and differences" characterizing those

discourses.

This "discourse on the method of the image" is important not only as it implies the film's concern with initiating a kind of Cartesian *tabula rasa* (the achieved zero), but as a way of underlining the epistemological structure common to our perception of both words and images. The security of the bourgeois tradition is based on its claim to overcome the obvious arbitrariness of its symbolic language by everywhere confirming it with a visual image pretending to be an iconic copy of the real. Each sustaining the other, this coincidence of sound and image is able to mask itself as a necessity, a state of fact, a state of nature. *Le Gai Savoir's* intent is to demonstrate to its audience that the visual image (the very substance of film) is, like language, the result of an arbitrary and coded manipulation all the more dangerous because it is so easily able to deny its arbitrariness.

As a medium, the film can potentially become the single most effective antidote to this ideology. In "real life" (ideological life) the twin systems of a symbolic language and an iconic imagery, as two arbitrarinesses circling in the same orbit, point always to the trace of the other as a sufficient confirmation of their combined adequacy to the "real": what language leaves unsaid, the image declares; what the image leaves vague, language makes precise. The film, as a union of sound and image, can choose to serve this ideology or to revolt against it. Godard's is the path of revolt. Rejecting all traces of his earlier allegiance to *cinéma-vérité*, to a natural alliance of sound and image aiming at the illusion of the real, he opts instead for a thoroughly stylized, thoroughly unrealistic, union of sound and image—his goal becomes that of *dissolving* almost chemically that societal "nature" existing at the interface of image and sound. Only in this way can the "real" be shown in its arbitrariness, in its highly motivated service to a definable political system. The film, as a medium permitting a radically new union of sound and image can thus become a vehicle of liberation. An effective revolution against economic and political exploitation can take place only when we have first overturned the properly epistemological imperialism on which it is founded. "Meaning," the symbol of our belief in an ability to represent the real in words and in images already given to us, becomes, like Rousseau's concept of money as the imposed common denominator of all value, the mark of the slave. One of the word-image montages punctuating the film states: "Representation or, more precisely, meaning plays the same role in language as does money in the economy or, more precisely, in the circulation of merchandise." The bank loans money as the dictionary loans words and as the world loans images—but all at a very high interest.

Godard's cinematic technique, as a revolutionary praxis, consists in restoring, on an explicit level, the implicit contradictions rendered invisible by the normal inclusion of every sound-image unit in a similarly oriented ideological context. A full-color magazine cover carrying the title *ACTION!* and showing a happy couple water skiing into the distance on a calm sea is made to reveal its suppressed contradiction when two letters are penciled in before the ostensible title transforming it into a call to

the *REACTION!* A photo of a white-smocked technician sitting before an oscilloscope and exuding connotations of intellectual competence, job security, and participation in the March of Progress reveals its suppressed implications when there is scrawled across it: *One Dimensional Man*. A photo of Malraux, the aged evangelist of tarnished Gaullist glories, is invaded by the letters C.R.S. [*Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité*: an auxiliary federal police organization scattered throughout France and immortalized in May '68 for their diligent repression by the slogan "C.R.S./S.S."] here transformed into their more indicative variants of *C ulture*, *R épublique*, *S ilence*.

"Hegel was the first thinker to use the slap as an irrefutable philosophic argument" states another of the word-image montages. Restoring the dialectical contradiction of images within the single image is the first step toward accomplishing Patricia's program of "turning against the enemy that very language with which he attacks us." It is precisely by means of these restored contradictions that the viewer comes to recognize language (both of sounds and of images) as semiotic systems mirroring nothing more than themselves and their own travestied creation which they designate as the "real": "You can't recognize your language," says Patricia. "Henceforth, you walk beyond these slow discrete signs. You are in the hollow of unleashed forces watching their multitude roll on, dense and diverse."

In each of the examples cited above a written word or phrase is used to initiate a counter-ideological, purgative movement within the single image. As the other alternative within this structure, an image can be used to identify the unenunciated relationship between two sounds. The question is raised as to how one can locate the "unspoken difference" between the sound *O* (the pursed lips of this phoneme becoming another in the series of references to the magic circle of the "con-science deflection," the evacuated and liberated space of revolutionary thought) and the word *Stalin*. This problem of the unspoken difference finds its solution on the other face of the inseparable sound-image continuum in that it is much later, after the analysis, that the pivotal image behind this acoustic passage is acted out as Patricia, with her back to the camera and standing in front of Emile, joyfully sings the sound *O* until, after a brutal yet methodic phonetics lesson from Emile, this free sound has conformed itself to the orthodoxy of his growled *A* (*StAlin*). Sound rejoins image, but this new union is no longer unconsciously enslaved by the categories of an unexamined real.

American viewers without a command of spoken French should be cautioned that the subtitles on the domestic version refuse, in a way paradoxically confirming Godard's contention, the radical implications of this analysis. Immediately after Patricia states that language must be turned against the enemy who uses it as a weapon to attack us, Emile points out that the first task is to learn the three A's: *alire*, *décrire*, *acompter*. The translator, taking these three A's as pleonastic prepositions, came up with our having to learn the three R's: reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic. In the French, however, these are not prepositions, but prefixes corresponding to the *a* of

amoral: we must learn to unread, unwrite and uncount. Anticipating the later inquiry into the child's letterbook, Godard situates the beginnings of our aculturation to the bourgeois order at that moment when we find ourselves forced to accept the basic symbolic codes through which a set of societal values will be imposed upon us. Learning to read, to write, and to count is the first step in an intra-cultural imperialism which can consolidate itself only when these codes have been imposed upon the unwary recipient. At one point in the film we see the image of an isolated hotel on a Caribbean beach. Written over it is the phrase "Cuba: territorio libre de anal-fabetismo." The word "libre" is circled and connected to another circled word written below it: "film." The subversion of the immediate meaning is clear: Cuba is not free of illiteracy; but, in a much more profound sense, it is free *because* it refuses to be literate, because it refuses even to read, to understand that language which, once accepted, is capable only of confirming the real and the established. *Le Gai Savoir* is, as a film, likewise free because it is based on the same rejection, the premise that there must first take place an analysis, a breaking down of that societal language of sounds and images which, if accepted, can only be used in the service of its creator.

At another point in the film reference is made to the exalted teachings of one "Isidore Sollers." The reference here is double: on the one hand to Isidore Ducasse, better known as Lautréamont, the author of *The Songs of Maldoror*, the nineteenth century text anticipating the contemporary attempt to subvert all those values on which our culture is based; the "Sollers" refers to Philippe Sollers, the contemporary novelist and critic who has written—to choose a passage particularly appropriate to this film: "We are always reading and writing, in our dreams, our perception, our acts, our phantasms, our thoughts—but we remain unaware of it to the extent that *we believe we know how to read and write*. We must dare to ask the question: can we be so sure that we are not taught to no longer be able to know and write *our own lives* from the very day we are told that we know how to read and write" (*Logiques*. Paris: Seuil, 1968; p. 247).

The third year, the elaboration of the sound-image model capable of sustaining revolutionary action, can exist only as a utopia. The first of its models is presented as a long, incomprehensible reading by Patricia from a book none of us can understand. The sounds we hear are those same phonemes making up the French language [the language of ideology / the language of diplomacy], but—with the exception of a few key words such as "language" and "take pleasure"—these phonemes never come together so as to form a recognizable meaning. That we, the audience, cannot understand this language is proof both that our own liberation cannot be accomplished vicariously and that, as Patricia points out, it is nothingness which is the final lesson of *Le Gai Savoir*.

As a film *Le Gai Savoir* is, in a very real sense, a sustained inquiry into the limitations and potential of this medium's role in a society which is politically and epistemologically pre-revolutionary. Rigorously

excluded from it are all the compromises, all the accommodation, all the acceptance of half-truths which would be inevitable in any supposed re-presentation of an already adequate revolutionary model. *Le Gai Savoir* is not a *mimesis* but a *poesis*: a step in the making rather than in the mirroring of a true (i.e. an adequate) revolution. As a film, it can, given the change in media, fulfill only that definition already proposed by Nietzsche is his own *Joyful Wisdom*: "Books—Of what account is a book that never carries us away beyond all books?" (*The Complete Works*. Vol. X. New York: Russel and Russel, 1964; p. 205).

It is this parallel insistence on "carrying us beyond all films" that forms the basis of this work's decidedly meta-cinematic character. Refusing all forms of conventional narration and character development, all forms of the comfortable (i.e. the pseudo-revolutionary implications of a *divertissement* like *Z* which contents itself with flattering all those liberal prejudices the viewer is asked to apply to a land so far away across the sea), this film unmasks the political and moral emptiness of our most fashionable cinematic products. In addition to the already mentioned Bergman parody, a mocking glimpse at the doloristic probing of our petit-bourgeois angst, there is another section in *Le Gai Savoir* entitled *Film Expérimental*: a meandering dot, keeping time to Mozart, traces a line across the image of an ever more filagreed design. Pure, meaningless form made watchable by a pleasant accompaniment drawn from the canon of the culture elite. Such an esthetic, claiming to be apolitical or suprapolitical, inevitably serves the reaction by choosing to ignore it, by choosing to situate its concern in some mythic elsewhere. The challenge of the film to be made cannot be overcome by choosing to divorce this medium from the *problem* of the real. Godard's choice of a butt is, in this case, particularly appropriate since such a fascination with film as film is often accompanied by the belief that properly political problems need not be directly confronted because they will solve themselves once the communications media (computer, video, cable T.V., satellite broadcast) have proceeded to the total enlightenment of all citizens as to the actions of their government.

Toward the end of *Le Gai Savoir* Patricia and Emile recite in unison the motto "Art provides the necessary solution, science the sufficient solution." The necessary and the sufficient; like theory and practice they must work together on the condition that it is art alone which, with its radical refusal of the known and its radical insistence on the other, can lead us to the models of interpretation necessary to a revolutionary art in the making. Art is the intuition as science is the exposition. Art probes, anticipates, stakes out what is to be developed and consolidated by science. Once again it is Nietzsche who, in his own *Joyful Wisdom* of almost a century ago, defined the necessary (and highly cinematic) form of such artistic exploration: "The Question of *Intelligibility*. And let me ask by the way: is it a lack that a thing has been touched upon in passing, glanced at, flashed at? Must one absolutely sit up in it in the first place? Must one have brooded on it as on an egg? [. . .] At least there are truths of a peculiar shyness and tick-

lishness which one can only truly get hold of suddenly and in no other way—which one must either *take by surprise* or leave alone” (p. 348). Rapid montage, momentary subversion of the image, fleeting alliances of sound and image, momentary glimpses of the real sandwiched between theoretical expositions, lightening transitions too often mistaken for dilettantism: these are only a few of the eminently cinematic aspects of a form which must be-

fore all else refuse to become rooted in, to attach itself too securely to an existing reality which is by nature insufficient and ideological.
The films that should be made are all, it seems, to come—and it is in the series beginning with *One Plus One* and culminating in *Tout va bien* that Godard will attempt to consolidate in a radically new esthetics what was the hard-learned lesson of *Le Gai Savoir*.

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CONTENTS
Number 3

Spring 1973

Ideology and Literature

GEORGE A. HUACO
ROBERT WEIMANN

JONATHAN CULLER
WILHELM GIRNUS
O. K. WERCKMEISTER
ROBERT SCHOLES
NORMAN O. BROWN
EUGENE VANCE
A. N. NIKOLYUKIN
D. W. FOKKEMA

Ideology and Literature
French Structuralism and Literary History:
Some Critiques and Reconsiderations
Structure of Ideology and Ideology of Structure
On the Problem of Ideology and Literature
Marx on Ideology and Art
The Illiberal Imagination
XV. KAL. MART. (February 15) LUPERCALIA
Signs of the City: Medieval Poetry as Detour
Past and Present Discussions of American National Literature
The Forms and Values of Contemporary Chinese Literature

Discussion

LEO MARX

Commentary

Literary History in the University

CHARLES T. SCOTT

Literary History at Wisconsin

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